

By Rep Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
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I support the troops, their families, and those who have sacrificed so much in this war. And, as a member of the Defense Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, I am committed to making sure our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan get everything they need -- every dollar, every dime, and every penny. It is the number one priority of the Subcommittee to keep the troops safe, properly equipped, and in a position to return home safely. But, like others who supported the Iraq efforts in the past, I have serious reservations about the President's new way forward.

On Friday, the House of Representatives voted on a resolution asking Members to support our troops, but to oppose the President's plan to send 21,500 more troops to Iraq . For me, this was a sobering moment. I have spent many days agonizing over the issue and I do not take lightly the judgment to rebuke the decision of the President, our Commander in Chief. But, I have sent off and welcomed home thousands of soldiers at Fort Benning. I have seen anguish on the faces of families as they watch their loved ones march off towards the uncertainty and peril that awaited them in Iraq and Afghanistan . I have seen the troops return home to those same families, their faces reflecting the elation, relief, and joy of seeing their loved ones safe at home. I have seen the veterans return with Purple Hearts, having lost arms, legs, and suffering from the mental trauma that result from war and the adverse impacts on their families. I have also stood and listened to "Taps" played over the bodies of too many who have returned in flag-draped coffins. It is time for a change.

The situation in Iraq has become very grave. Like General Schoomaker and countless other U.S. Military professionals, I believe we should not surge without a purpose, and that purpose should be measurable in its outcome. Thus far, the President has not set forth a clear marker against which the purpose and the outcome can be measured. Previous increases in troop strength have not brought a reduction in violence or quelling of sectarian strife. Rather, the problems have intensified, casualties have increased, and the political situation shows more cracks, corruption, and signs of instability every day.

There are those who say we should not oppose the President's plan without presenting an alternative. I think that may be a fair challenge, but there is another way. We need a new strategy that is based on redeployment rather than further military engagement, one that is centered on handing Iraq back to the Iraqis. I agree with many of my colleagues who believe that Iraq cannot make the political progress necessary for its stability and security until U.S. forces redeploy. To achieve stability in Iraq and the region, we must redeploy from Iraq.

Why, you might ask? 91 percent of the Sunnis and 74 percent of the Shia want us out. 72 percent of Americans who served in Iraq last year believe that we should be out by now. 61 percent of Iraqis approve of attacks on U.S.-led forces. They see us as occupiers and want us out. The longer we stay, the more troops we send, the more violence we see -- the more we help the recruiting of radical extremists. So, we must redeploy first from Saddam's palaces in Baghdad , then from the cities, the factories, and universities. We must give the country back to the Iraqis and let them govern themselves and rebuild.

Next, we must execute a robust and diplomatic effort, and we must regain our credibility by denouncing aspirations for permanent bases. We must shut down Guantanamo and bulldoze Abu Ghraib prison. These are black eyes on the face of our international credibility. We must clearly articulate a policy of no torture, no exceptions. Then, we must engage dialogue with Iraq and all of its neighbors to promote investment of resources and cooperation for security by the other Arab countries in the region.

Most importantly, we need to repair and restore our strategic military reserves that have already been stressed to the breaking point. Because of the large force already in Iraq, Army ground forces here at home are not mission ready. This is due to both equipment and personal shortages. The National Guard that remains at home is woefully unready to meet their statutory obligations based on natural disasters, wildfires, terrorism, and other threats to the homeland. The large presence in Iraq has drained readiness and equipment and personnel from the rest of our military. The surge will cost us dearly in billions of dollars and time, and we desperately need to repair, to reconstitute, and to reset our forces to face other significant threats at home and around the world.

We cannot stay the course we are on. We must change. Voting for this resolution would support our troops and our long-term national security.